

The Office of Elder in the Christian Church

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Scripture Texts: Exodus 18:10-27; Titus 1:1-9

I. Introduction

II. Old Testament History

- a. Definition: "literally, one of the older men with presumed superiority in knowledge and experience.
- b. Official Title: (Eliezer Gen. 24:2; Pharaoh's officers Gen 50:7; David's head servants 2 Sam. 12:17; Master Workmen Ezek. 27:9
- c. Title of respect & reverence – *Signore* – Gen. 50:7; political office. See Num. 22:7 – Moabites & Midianites. Throughout the Bible Seniority commands respect. Lev. 20:32
- d. Elders present at the beginning of Egyptian captivity. Ex. 3:16;
- e. The 1st 70 present at the ratification of Covenant. (*Nobles-deep-rooted/high stock*) Ex. 24:9-11
- f. The 2nd 70 chosen & Spirit filled, to assist Moses Nu. 11:16, 17; Ex. 18:10-27
- g. Origin of official designation unknown.
- h. **Terms Elders/People used as equivalent terms.** Joshua 24:1, 2, 19, 21; I Sam. 8:4, 7, 10, 19;
- i. Authority undefined & extended to all matters.
- j. Nation established:
 - Titles Tribe specific: Elders of Israel/Elders of the Land/Elders of Judah/District Governors/Local magistrates – Appointed per Moses Deut. 16:18.
 - Sit at the gate to administer Justice. Deut. 19:12; Ruth 4:9, 11; I Kings 21:8
 - Great in number and influence – recd. honor from David. I Sam.30:26-31
 - Retained position under all political changes from the period of the Judges see 2:7; 8:14/David, Saul and other Kings. See I Sam. 8:4; 30:26; I Chr. 21:16; 2 Sam. 17:4; 1 Ki. 12:6; 21:11
 - Period of Captivity. See Jer. 29:1; Ezek. 8:1 & Return from Exile. See Ezra 5:5; 6:7
 - Commencement of Christian era; Elders distinct body from Sanhedrin, Acted in concert with dominant classes: Chief Priests Matt. 21:23; Chief Priests/Scribes Matt. 16:21 or the Council Matt. 26:59
 - Luke describes the whole order by the term *Presbuthrion*, meaning Eldership Luke 22:66

III. New Testament Office

- a. Origin of office – no specific account; demand arose very early.
- b. Purpose: A wide diffusion of gifts, but provision needed for the regular and fixed instruction of the multiplying churches
- c. Patterned after Jewish Synagogue (College of Elders/Synagogue Officials/Presbuteroi) Mark 5:22;
- d. Christian Elders first mentioned at Jerusalem-Acts 11:30
- e. Synagogue model passed on to Gentile Churches. 1 Cor. 16:15 Phillip Schaff
- f. Various titles employed: Eph. 4:11, Acts 20:28; Hebrews 13:7; I Th. 5:12 Pastors/Teachers
- g. Plurality: Acts 11:30; Phil.1:1; 1 Tim. 4:14; James 5:14/NOTE: Household Congregations Ro. 16; 1 Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15
- h. Parity vs Episcopacy: Acts 20:17 & 28; Titus 1:5 & 7 DCG : Chapter 3 intro
- i. Disadvantages

IV. Duties of the Elder: 1 Tim. 3:1

- a. Shepherd under the Chief Shepherd: *Prophet/Priest/King*
- b. Seated in the Court
- c. Teaching
- d. Personal Integrity
- e. Knowledge of the Congregation
- f. Visit the sick
- g. Look for replacements
- h. Total reliance upon God

V. Duties of the Congregation:

- a. Be encouraged
- b. Honor your Elders
- c. Follow your Elders
- d. Listen to your Elders
- e. Respect your Elders
- f. Pray for your Elders